A LADY's RELIGION. IN A LETTER

To the Honourable

My Lady *Howard.*

BIBLIOTHECA LAMBETHANA

By a Divine of the Church of *England.*

With a Prefatory Epistle to the same Lady, By a Lay-Gentleman.

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MADAM,

I *Never read any thing with more pleaſure and ſatisfaction than the moſt ingenious* Letter of Religion *addreſs'd to your Ladyſhip. The Author's noble deſign, and happy method of executing it, could add nothing to the value I always had for his great* Learning, Candor, *and* Ingenuity. *But to find his performance approv'd by a*

Perſon of your Ladyſhip's extraordinary Judgment and Vertues, has, I own, very conſiderably increas'd my veneration for him.

If my Opinion is of any weight with your Ladyſhip, I think he has ſhewn Religion to be plain, ſhort, and intelligible, according to thoſe very rules by which he tries its orthodoxy: And that the knowledge of it depends not upon the helps of Spurious Learning, he has with a deal of genuine Learning demon-

demonſtrated. What ought to recomend him moſt, is, that although he be a Divine, yet he pretends not to make any thing paſs upon you by vertue of the bare Authority of his Profeſſion; but he modeſtly writes as an unprejudic'd Perſon, what he believes any other had a right of doing, whom your Ladyſhip would pleaſe to honour with her Commands.

'Tis now extremely rare to meet with Learning, Liberty, and Integrity, united

in one Perſon; as we find 'em in our Friend. For Learning is frequently attended with Prejudices, Biggotry and Pride; Freedom of thought turns into Licentionſneſs, when 'tis not guided by knowledge; and we perceive moſt Men every day ſacrifice both Learning and Liberty to their Intereſt. But what's of more fatal conſequence is, That ſeveral who have the Reputation of thoſe Endowments, are the fartheſt in the World from poſſeſſing them. Learning, for Example,

ample, is a term of great Ambiguity. True Learning *conſiſts* in the Knowledge of things as they are in themſelves, and the expreſſing of this Knowledge in proper words whereby it is convey'd into the minds of others. *To this a right* Method *indeed is neceſſary, but* Elegance *only accidental.*

This is a natural and eaſy notion; but did it univerſally obtain, Learning *would become more common than is*

compatible with ſome Mens intereſt. To fruſtrate therefore all its native and uſeful effects, Learning *muſt be made to conſiſt in ſtrange and difficult words, in the meer Grammatical Knowledge of Languages, without any regard to the ſenſe, if ſometimes they have any; in frivolous, precarious, and impertinent diſtinctions; in Etymologies, a World of old ſtories, and the Lord knows what Gibberiſh and Non-ſenſe. This the truely Learned call* Pedantry.

But

But your Ladiſhip being apt to think others can have no indirect deſigns no more than your ſelf, may imagine that this falſe Notion could never be induſtriouſly promoted, but might be only the prevailing effect of caſual Ignorance in certain places and times. I ſhan't trouble you now, Madam, with a Hiſtorical account of the matter; but I beg of you to conſider two or three things which may be capable of undeceiving a leſs diſcerning Perſon. This

kind of Learning, *in the first place, being attain'd with mighty difficulty, very few of either* Sex *have the* Patience, *or the leisure to study for it; and so most of the* World *are oblig'd to take it at second hand from others, who never think themselves over-paid in consideration of their pains or merit. Be pleas'd next to remember, that the ignorant are no proper Judges of* Learning, *and that all those who are not Men of Art being ignorant, must therefore never pretend*

to

to queſtion or contradict any thing the Learned ſay; much leſs may they take upon 'em to teach or inſtruct others. Now, Madam, if you don't think this Privilege of being excluſively of all others the only Men of Learning, the only allow'd Teachers, and the only Judges of what they themſelves do teach, to be a form'd deſign; if you don't think it as dextrouſly manag'd as any other joint-ſtock, or monopoly in the World; if you don't think the advan-

tages

tages worth the pains of contriving the Scheme; I'm content to loſe your Ladyſhip's good Opinion, which I prefer to that of all the Learned in Four Ages I could name, adding the majority of ſuch as are now ſo accounted.

There's nothing more obvious than that this artful Learning deſtroys all Liberty *of courſe; and as for* Integrity, *they are inconſiſtent, as Paint and Beauty: for our Learned Guide muſt be*

be always telling us that he labours for our information; ſo far at leaſt, he muſt complement us for our Patience and Money. But that he otherwiſe intends, our ſlow proficiency aſſures us; Reaſon alſo does convince us that 'tis againſt his intereſt we ſhould improve, for ſo in time he grows uſeleſs; and he often blabs out the ſecret himſelf when he tells us that what he ſays is unintelligible, and not to be apprehended by us in this World; whatever we may

do

do in the next. How Religion has thriv'd, or is like to do ſo under ſuch management, I need not particularly deſcribe to your Ladyſhip; who more readily ſees all the conſequences, than many others can conceive the thing it ſelf.

As Religion *is the concern of all, ſo our Author ſhews the ſtudy of it to be the buſineſs of every body; and that nothing can be true Religion, which Poverty, want*

of

of Letters, particular Callings, or any condition of Life can hinder us from acquiring. Wherein this Excellent and moſt divine Religion (which depends not upon certain forms, times, perſons or places) does conſiſt, I ſhan't repeat out of the Letter which you have already perus'd; but give it you in the words of Minutius Felix, *the moſt Eloquent of the Chriſtian Apologiſts.* Do you think, *ſays he to the Idolaters,* that we conceal what we adore, becauſe we have no Temples

ples nor Altars? For what Image can I frame of God, when, if you rightly conſider, Man himſelf is his Image? What *Temple* ſhall I build for him, when the whole Univerſe, which he has made, is not able to contain him? And when I that am but a Man, can command a larger habitation, ſhall I confine the power of the Divine Majeſty within one ſmall ſhrine? Should we not rather dedicate a *Temple* to him in our Minds, and conſecrate an

an *Altar* for him in our hearts? Shall I offer thoſe things in Victims and Sacrifices to the Lord, which he has created for my *uſe*; ſcornfully throwing back his *gifts* to himſelf again? This were Ingratitude; when the moſt pleaſing *Sacrifices* to him are a *good diſpoſition*, a *pure mind*, and a *ſincere Conſcience*. Whoſoever therefore keeps himſelf *Innocent*, he prays to the Lord; He that loves *Juſtice*, does offer him *Sacrifice*; whoever abſtains from

from *fraud*, procures the *favour* of God; and he that delivers any out of *distress*, makes him an agreeable *offering*. These are our *Sacrifices*, this is our *Divine Service*: And he that is the *honestest Man* among us, him we also count the most *Religious*.

Are not these, Madam, are not these most charming and Heavenly Expressions? Here's the description of a Religion *truly becoming the Dignity and Goodness of the Divine Nature.*

Nature. 'Tis as general as Mankind; not varied by their different Languages, Occupations, or Cuſtoms; and as much the intereſt of all in general, as it muſt be the delight of every honeſt Man to obſerve it.

Now if true Learning *be nothing elſe, as I ſaid,* but the knowledge of things properly expreſs'd, (*and of this, Madam, you ſhow your Sex to be very capable*) *I ſee no reaſon why all Men indifferently ſhould not as lawfully*

teach,

teach, as they are bound to practiſe, their Religion. Why Women *likewiſe may not enjoy the privilege of inſtructing others in the Religious duties, which they are oblig'd to practiſe themſelves, I want ſtill to be inform'd. They have the ſame Senſes of Seeing and Hearing with us, they have the ſame Faculties of Thinking and Speaking, they learn to read and write with the ſame Facility, they equally underſtand the notions of Virtue and Vice, of Diſrepute and Honour, of Wiſdom*

Wiſdom and Folly; they are as much concern'd, as we are for their own happineſs, as well as that of their Friends; and will be ſo for that of all Mankind, when they conſider themſelves oblig'd to contribute towards the preſervation of the whole, in the good whereof their own is involv'd. Some Women have left behind them Illuſtrious Monuments of their Invention, Knowledge, and Courage; and what particular perſons have done, 'tis poſſible for the generality

of

of the Species to do, or more. Nor can I perceive any difference between us, but that of Sex and Education; and to whom the defects of the latter are to be imputed, any Man would bluſh to relate that is concern'd for the honour or juſtice of our kind. The particular care your Ladyſhip has taken to inform a great many of your poor ignorant Neighbour's Minds, as well as to feed and cover their Bodies, is a Demonſtration that the duty of Inſtruction may be as ſucceſs-

fully

fully perform'd by your Sex, as that of Charity or good works.

I don't underſtand you right, Madam, or I need not beg your Pardon for publiſhing this little piece without your privity or permiſſion. Reaſon, *I know, is the* Oracle *that muſt decide this buſineſs: And there ſeems to be more reaſon for the liberty I have taken, than for our Author's compliance with your Ladyſhip's requeſt, tho' he was likewiſe in the right. He wrote nothing but what*

he

he was convinc'd you perfectly understood before, taught by the original dictates of your own fruitful mind; so you receiv'd his admirable performance, rather as a mark of his respect, than a present you needed: therefore I presume now to distribute it among those of yours and my own Sex, who want such an assistance from him: You envy no person, I'm sure, those divine perfections of Body and Mind, whereof your Enemies (if you can have any) must own you are Mistress; much less would you deprive others of the benefit they may receive from this Treatise, although the usefulness of it to your self was prevented by an excellent genius. That you may be ever happy, Madam, is the constant desire of

Your Ladyship's most Observant

Friend and Admirer.

ADEISIDÆMON.

A LADY's RELIGION.

MADAM,

SInce God has been pleas'd to incline your heart to an early and ſerious enquiry after Religion, to that you are ſincerely deſirous to

know the will of God, in order to do it, I heartily wiſh you had laid your Commands upon one more able to aſſiſt you, than I am: who, being bred up in an Age of Speculation and Controverſy, have addicted my ſelf to the ſtudy of Divinity more perhaps than to the practice of Religion; and have been (I pray God forgive me) more deſirous to furniſh my Head with Notions, than my Heart with good Inclinations. I thought my

my ſelf, by my Profeſſion, chiefly engag'd in a ſtudy how to defend the Church by Law eſtabliſh'd againſt all Diſſenters, rather than to promote the common cauſe of ſerious Piety; and whilſt by the ſtrange unaccountable genius of this Age, I have been led aſide to mix the ſtudy of Politicks with that of Religion, I have been buſily aſſiſting the Office of a Miniſter of State, rather than doing

the good work of a Minister of *Jesus Christ*.

Now although it has pleas'd God to make me in some measure sensible of those By-paths, in which I have sometimes walk'd, to the hindrance of that duty unto which I ought intirely to have devoted my self; yet I am apt to fear lest those Prejudices and undue Prepossessions of Mind may still remain within me, by which I shall be prevented from giving

ving your Ladyſhip ſuch an Idea of Religion, as is ſhort, plain, and pure, free from ſuperſtitious Appendages, and ſeparate from every by-intereſt.

But without doubt ſuch as this is the true Spirit of the Chriſtian Religion, every line whereof directly tends to make us eaſy within our ſelves, kind and comfortable to one another here, and happy with God hereafter.

That our holy Religion is a wiſe Inſtitution, will be evident to any one who conſiders that God is its Author, whoſe Wiſdom appears in all his Works: Thus the frame of viſible nature being agreeably ſet together, and having each part of it ſuited to uſeful and proper ends, demonſtrates it ſelf to be the work of divine Wiſdom: in like manner the whole Plan of pure Religion, having alſo its parts ſuitable

to

to each other, and every one of them agreeably ſet to the ſame good and great Deſign of the whole, does thereby prove it ſelf to be the contrivance of an All-wiſe God.

And hereby the Wiſdom of the Chriſtian Religion will particularly appear, becauſe every part of it tends to promote the univerſal good of Mankind; for which reaſon the divine Founder thereof was nam'd *Jeſus*, (that is) *Saviour*,

viour, becauſe his only deſign was to ſave us from the prevailing power of Sin, and from thoſe Miſeries in which that evil power would involve us.

Thus *Temperance* promotes our Health, *Juſtice* in our dealings prevents us from ſuſtaining the revenges of the injur'd, and gains us truſt among Men, with all the benefits which ariſe from thence. *Charity* by promoting the common good of others draws back

back their love and affection to our ſelves, while *Patience* preſerves quiet within our own Breaſts, and *Self-denial* by reſtraining our extravagant Appetites, eſtabliſhes the juſt power of Reaſon over us; thereby fitting us for all conditions of life; and thus the law of *Chriſt* anſwers to the Character of Wiſdom, by its agreeableneſs to the beſt deſign of God in the chiefeſt good of Man: and upon this account *Solomon* character'd

the Idea of Religion under the name of Wiſdom.

Beſide theſe moral duties there are ſeveral threats of God's Judgments and promiſes of his favour contain'd in Chriſt's Inſtitution; the former were wiſely deſign'd to reſtrain us from Immoralities, which are our greateſt Follies; and the latter to engage us in the practice of Vertue, which is our greateſt Wiſdom: the threatnings prepare the way

way for the Promiſes, and qualify us to receive 'em; in as much as they ſhake off our affections from ill objects, in order for the Promiſes to fix them upon good ones. We muſt needs ceaſe to do evil, before we can learn to do well.

Now although a due conſideration of the divine nature will carry us on to the belief of a future ſtate, in which he who is in perfection the beſt of all Beings, will diſtinguiſh the good

good from the bad by ample rewards and juſt puniſhments: yet becauſe every ones capacity may not be ſufficient to make this wiſe reflection, therefore *JeſusChriſt* was pleas'd (as the Goſpel phraſes it) *to bring Life and immortality to light*: *i. e.* to give the World full aſſurance of a future ſtate, in which the juſt God will diſtinguiſh Men hereafter in ſuch a manner as they ſhall diſtinguiſh themſelves here; and 'tis the wiſdom

wiſdom of every one to preſerve this belief in his heart, and bear it always about him, becauſe 'tis the moſt awful Monitor againſt our committing folly, and yields the ſtrongeſt encouragement to Virtue.

From what has been ſaid, your Ladyſhip ſees firſt what is meant by *ſaving a Soul*, viz. to deliver it from vitious habits and fearful puniſhments, the fatal conſequents of ſuch habits;

habits; and by eſtabliſhing Virtue therein to recommend it to the favour of God. And ſecondly, that the Goſpel of Chriſt was deſign'd to this very end; and its tendency hereunto is its Wiſdom. And thirdly, from hence you alſo perceive in what reſpect Faith in *Jeſus Chriſt* is ſaid to ſave us, *viz.* becauſe this Faith is our receiving the Chriſtian Moral for the Rule of our lives, and the threats and Promiſes contain'd in the Goſpel,

Goſpel, for the outward motives of our practice according to that Rule.

And from theſe three conſiderations, ſumm'd up together, you may examine all the various pretences which differing Churches and Communions make to the purity of Chriſtian Faith, ſo as to form a right judgment of 'em; for that Communion which manifeſts it ſelf to have no other deſign than to aſſiſt its Members in

in ſaving their Souls from the power of Sin by the Moral and Motives aforemention'd, is certainly the pureſt Church; and that Faith which has no other tendency, is the pureſt Faith. So that if you form your ſelf upon this Principle, you may paſs by all nice Speculations, or profound Myſteries, which have no direct tendency to improve your Morals, without any hazard of Salvation.

Secondly,

Secondly, As the Chriſtian Inſtitution is wiſely practical, ſo it is plain: or in other words, we may ſay, that as the wiſdom of the Chriſtian Religion appears firſt by its being *practical*, ſo it appears ſecondly by being *plain*. The obſcure anſwers which were given out from the old Heathen Oracles, are now known to have proceeded from the indirectneſs of a deſigning Prieſthood: who,

to

to maintain their pretence of foretelling what ſhall come to paſs, ſent back all thoſe who came to inquire after future events, with doubtful and uncertain Anſwers. And it has been the obſervation of wiſe Men, that when any one affects to be dark and myſterious in his Converſation, either he has ſome indirect deſign in ſo doing, or elſe whilſt he makes an oſtentation of wiſdom he does in reality but diſcover his folly.

Now

Now the Wiſdom of God cannot be conceiv'd to aim at any other deſign in communicating it ſelf to us, than the Information of our Minds in the nature of good and evil, and this in order to direct our choice; and all Inſtruction muſt of neceſſity be plain: ſince 'tis by things eaſy and familiar, ſuch as at firſt ſight we may apprehend, whereby we can be led on to the knowledge of matters more remote

mote and difficult: but obſcure and unintelligible doctrines can have no effect upon us beſide unprofitable amuſement; and *whatſoever is by the wiſdom of God laid out of our reach, can be no part of our concern.*

Farther, to what end did he give us intellectual Faculties? ſurely not to amuſe but to improve us, by enabling us throughly to underſtand each part of our holy Religion, which directly

directly tends to that end, *viz.* our moral Improvement: as you will ſoon perceive, if you reduce the Chriſtian Inſtitution to its general heads, which are theſe.

Firſt, A Narration of matters of Fact.

Secondly, A Declaration of moral Laws.

Thirdly, A Revelation of ſuch motives which are proper to inforce this Law upon our minds. And

Fourthly,

Fourthly, Serious Exhortations to refreſh our Memories with our duty: and earneſtly to recommend it to our practice.

Firſt, Your Ladyſhip ſees, that the matters of fact contain'd in the four Goſpels, and the Acts of the Apoſtles (*viz.* the Travels and Tranſactions of Chriſt and his Diſciples) are ſo plainly related, that you underſtand the Relation as eaſily as you read it. And

Secondly,

Secondly all Laws *muſt* be plain, becauſe they are Directions. Now, obſcure directions are but Deluſions. And *Laws* which are dubious and difficult to be underſtood, are *Traps* and *Snares*. And Thirdly, 'Tis as neceſſary that *Motives* ſhould be very intelligible, becauſe their deſign is to work ſtrongly upon our Wills, by convincing our Underſtandings. Add to this Fourthly, That myſtical and unintelligible *Exhortations* are ridiculous,

upon

upon which account St. *Paul* forbad religious Exercises to be perform'd in an unknown Tongue.

Now as the four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles contain matters of fact, laws, and motives; so the Epistles contain Exhortations to Seriousness and Piety, arising from the laws, facts, and motives before-mention'd: and I take these Books to be sufficiently comprehensive of the Institutions and Ordi-

nances

nances of Jeſus Chriſt: which ought indeed to be eaſily intelligible, becauſe they concern the poor weak, and unletter'd People as much as the Learned.

Nor can I ſee that the doctrine of Chriſt was by him, or his Apoſtles, deliver'd firſt of all into the hands of the learned to be by them convey'd into the minds of the ignorant; but on the contrary, 'tis manifeſt that our Saviour di-

rected both his diſcourſes and actions immediately to the common people as well as to the Scribe; and in like manner did his Diſciples addreſs their Preachings and Writings.

From all this Diſcourſe concerning the clearneſs of Chriſt's Inſtitution, you may ſpare your ſelf the needleſs trouble of reading abſtruſe and myſterious points of Divinity. Nor need you ſuffer your ſelf to be amus'd with the pretended

pretended deep Speculations of profound Men, when you have the plain directions of a wiſe, and a good God before you, in following whereof you ſhall meet with great reward.

Thirdly, The Chriſtian Inſtitution is ſhort. True and genuine Religion has always been ſumm'd up, and gathered together into a narrow compaſs, by thoſe who beſt underſtood it. Thus *Micah* (6. 8.) ſpeak-

ing of God, ſaith, *He hath ſhewn thee, O Man, what is good, and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee? but to do juſtice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* And our Saviour ſumms up the whole Law in our Love to God, and our Neighbour. And in another place includes the whole ſcope of the Law and the Prophets, in this one Rule, *Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, even ſo do ye unto them*; hereby directing us

to

to make a right uſe of that Reaſon which God eſtabliſh'd as his Oracle in our Breaſts: to which we may at all times reſort; and from whence we may be reſolv'd in ſuch caſes as concern our duty to one another.

For as by conſulting your own reaſon, you know wherein you are juſtly dealt with, and wherein you receive wrong; when you are kindly us'd, and when otherwiſe: ſo from

the ſame principle of reaſon you cannot but know when you deal juſtly or wrongfully, and when you do kind or ill offices to another; this one ſhort comprehenſive Rule, takeing for its Foundation the Equality of Mankind in reſpect of their common nature, renders Religion it ſelf a matter *ſenſible* unto us.

For I can feel the wound of a ſharp ſlanderous Tongue as ſenſibly as that of

of a Sword; I can feel the wrongs done to my ſelf and Family; and am as much ſenſible of the benefits I enjoy from the juſt and kind dealings of thoſe with whom I am concern'd; and hereby I am in the ſhorteſt and plaineſt way admoniſh'd of my behaviour to others: and if this one ſhort Rule were reduc'd to practice, the ſtate of Paradiſe would be reſtor'd, and we ſhould enjoy a Heaven upon Earth.

For hereby firſt all Perſecutions for Conſcience ſake, which have occaſion'd ſuch violent diſorders, and vaſt effuſion of blood, would be at an end, becauſe every one who has any Conſcience, would moſt willingly preſerve it free from the Impoſitions of Men in the worſhip of God. To compel Men by Fire and Faggot to partake even of a delicious Entertainment, is a ſavage ſort of Hoſpitality. Se-

Secondly, All Factions in any State would be at an end, if every Member thereof were contented that every one of his Fellow-Members who was not an Enemy to the Government, might, having equal pretence of Merit, enjoy equal Privileges with himſelf.

Thirdly, The occaſions of War and Law-Suits would be taken away. Since nothing but mani-

feſt wrong can be the juſt cauſe of either.

And Fourthly, There would be no private quarrels, and uneaſineſs among Neighbours; Since by this Rule of doing as we would be done unto, all raſh Cenſures, ſharp reflections, and ungrounded ſuſpicions and jealouſies, which are the Seeds of private Animolities, are taken away. And hereby we may expect a plentiful ſtore of God's Bleſſings among us, who

who will meaſure out his kindneſs to us in the ſame manner, as we meaſure out ours to one another.

The reaſon why Religion ſhould be both a ſhort and plain Inſtitution, will appear if you conſider the common circumſtances and conditions of Men in this World. For though your Ladyſhip and many more, have leiſure enough to read and digeſt whole Volumes of uſeful Knowledge (if there are any ſuch)

ſuch) yet the greateſt part of Mankind being neceſſarily imploy'd in making daily proviſions for themſelves and Families, and diſcharging the common offices of Life, cannot attend to any religious Inſtitution which is either difficult or tedious.

'Tis certain, That the whole Life of Man is not ſufficient for him to read all the Controverſies which have been written upon pretence of Religion; but 'tis

'tis as certain, That God never lays on us a greater task than what he affords us both Abilities and Opportunities to perform: wherefore we may conclude, That ſince the duties of Religion are laid in common upon all, the poor Day-Labourer muſt have ability and opportunity ſufficient to inſtruct himſelf therein, without hindering the conſtant work of his Calling. And in all this the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God are made known,

known, by adapting our duties to our circumſtances of Life.

From hence you may ſave your ſelf the trouble of reading the long and tedious Diſputes which with ſuch intemperate Zeal are always in agitation among the ſeveral Parties of Chriſtians. Indeed the true Chriſtian Inſtitution being ſhort, it cannot admit of being ſpun out into long Controverſies: And tho' I have read many Books of

of Controverſial Divinity, I do not remember that I have met with any one Controverſy about the matter of *meer* Religion; as whether I ſhould maintain in my heart a high reverence and veneration for Almighty God? Whether I ought to walk before him in Sincerity and Uprightneſs? Whether or no I ſhould be thankful to him for all the benefits which I have receiv'd from him? Whether I ſhall ſubmit to his will with Patience,

ence, and endeavour to govern my Paſſions, to bring them to a due moderation and temper, by making them ſubject to the Law of Reaſon? Whether I ſhould be true to my Promiſe, juſt in my Dealings, charitable to the Poor, and ſincere in my Devotions? Whether I ſhould be temperate and ſober, modeſt and chaſt, and demean my ſelf in an humble, civil, and agreeable manner towards thoſe with whom I converſe? Whe-

Whether I ſhould be heartily ſorry when I come ſhort of my duty, and ſhould be watchful in the denial of my irregular Appetites, Paſſions, and evil Inclinations for the future? In ſhort it has not (that I know of) been diſputed whether Juſtice, Benignity, Meekneſs, Charity, Moderation, Patience and Sobriety, ſhould be receiv'd into our affections? or whether we ſhould love God and our Neighbour? *Orthodoxy of Faith* is made

made the pretence of Controverſy, but the one thing neceſſary is *Orthodoxy of practice.*

I know your Ladyſhip will not be pleas'd with a Diſcourſe upon the ſubject of Religion, unleſs Devotion have its due place in it; nor ought it indeed to be left out, becauſe thankfulneſs is a neceſſary *part* of Religion, and Prayer is the *Preſervative* of the whole. A frequent repetition of our thanks

thanks for all the benefits we enjoy, preſerve in our Minds the conſideration of God as the greateſt and beſt of Beings; and thereby nouriſhes Veneration and Gratitude. In like manner Prayer for Pardon of Sin, and preſervation of our Perſons, is a conſtant Recognition of the Mercy and bounty of God. But Prayer againſt the power of Sin, is the actual withdrawing of our Inclinations from Evil; and Prayer for any Grace is an actual

actual application of our Minds, to attain the particular Virtue for which we pray.

Now although I would not adviſe you againſt ſet Hours and Forms of Devotion, either private or publick; yet I would rather recommend a ſort of habitual and occaſional Devotion, as very proper to preſerve the ſtrongeſt Impreſſions of Religion upon your Mind.

It

It may be obſerv'd that many who are very punctual in keeping to their exact times and forms of Devotion, have fallen ſhort of any viſible improvement in Virtue. The ſame Pride, Frowardneſs, Falſhood, Covetouſneſs, and bitterneſs of Spirit, have appear'd in many who have been conſtant frequenters of the publick as well as Cloſet Forms of Prayer; as if God had not been in all their thoughts.

The

The reaſon whereof ſeems to be becauſe their formal Petitions ſuperſede their habitual Endeavours. Men are apt to think that ſince they ſpend in every day ſuch a portion of time in Prayer, they have done all their part: And ſo they leave God Almighty to take care of the event. And this is indeed all we can do when we make our Petitions to our Benefactors upon Earth, *viz.* offer up our requeſts to them, either by word or writing,

and

and then only expect their anſwer.

But 'tis otherwiſe with relation to God. Our Petitions to him muſt not take off from our conſtant endeavours to perform that work for which we pray his Enablement. And this occaſional Devotion, which I would recommend, is in its own nature a conſtant endeavour after Virtue, as well as a ſerious Petition for it. For it ariſeth from a frequent obſervation of

our ſelves in our particular occurring circumſtances; from which obſervation ſuitable deſires will almoſt neceſſarily flow. As if at any time I find that I have done an ill thing, immediately upon the diſcovery, I beg God's Pardon, and reſolve to make recompence for the ill I have done. Or if I have deſign'd any evil in my heart, and preſently beg Pardon of him who knoweth the ſecrets thereof; in ſo doing I have given

ven check to its progreſs. In like manner, if I have ſpoken ſlanderouſly, raſhly, or injuriouſly concerning any one; and upon Recollection thereof I ask forgiveneſs of God, and deſire that I may not do the like for the future: but on the contrary, that I may govern my Tongue better; in all this I am labouring to with-draw my Soul from evil, and to form my ſelf upon a principle of Virtue.

Every Night and Morning are proper times of leiſure to call to Mind the preſervation, ſupport, and advantages we have receiv'd the day or night preceding. And this Recollection being accompany'd with thankfulneſs to our great Preſerver, is the actual continuance and carrying on of our gratitude to God. If I perceive Pride or Paſſion to ariſe in my heart, ſo that I am apt to put a great va-

lue

lue upon every thing I do, and deſpiſe others : or if I find my ſelf eagerly concern'd for any little Worldly advantage, or any ſmall punctilio of honour; and hereupon I beg of God for an humble Spirit, and a Heavenly Mind; I am herein endeavouring to expel the Poiſon of Sin by its proper Antidote.

We cannot but feel the Diſorders of our Minds, as much as the Diſeaſes of

our Bodies. And the cauſes of a diſorder'd Mind are much more eaſily diſcern'd, than the cauſes of a Bodily Diſtemper. For either my Mind is troubl'd for want or loſſes, or it may be for the proſperity of others, or want of a revenge, or becauſe I cannot have my will in what I deſign'd. Upon theſe or ſuch like occaſions, the proper Cure is Devotional in begging God's Pardon for my diſcontent: and being deſi-

rous

rous that my will ſhould be ſubmitted to his who has taught me that I ſhould not return evil for evil, but that I ſhould love my Neighbour as my ſelf. This ſort of Soliloquy, and occaſional mental addreſs to God, is a ſure way to compoſe the diſorders of our thoughts. For the growing power of any Sin is moſt certainly ſuppreſs'd by introducing the oppoſite Virtue into our deſires.

The ſame method may be uſed as to Sins of Omiſſion. A ſerious Perſon will obſerve neglects of common duties, which reſpect either God or Man. He cannot but take notice how much he has neglected his buſineſs, or his health; how little he has conſider'd God as his Owner, Governour and Benefactor: and how ſmall a portion of what God has bleſs'd him with he has laid out upon the good of his

hisFellow-Creatures. And if hereupon a Man is seriously desirous to become more dutiful to God, more useful to himself, and beneficial to others, he is therein actually bending his mind to supply his former Omissions.

This casual Devotion arising from the observation of our selves, under the common circumstances of Life (although it can have no set times and forms prescrib'd to it)

will be very effectual to produce, preſerve, and increaſe a true ſenſe of Religion within us. And if you are pleas'd to apply your thoughts hereunto, as occaſion ſhall direct you, this Devotion will ſoon become habitual, cuſtomary and eaſy. And its returns, which will be frequent and ſhort, will be a continual reſtraint from evil-doing, and an actual exerciſe of Virtue.

This

This exercise which I have been prescribing is commonly reserv'd to be perform'd all at once, in an actual preparation before receiving the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*; which is usually perform'd by help of an artificial Catalogue of Sins methodically collected out of the Ten Commandments, according to which Catalogue set Forms of Confessions are drawn up, which the Preparant is to

take upon content, and without any ſort of judgment or diſcretion of his own, he confeſſes himſelf guilty of all the Sins therein mention'd together, with all their Aggravations, though, it may be, many of them were of ſuch a heinous nature, as never enter'd into his heart to commit. And if theſe Catalogues and confeſſional Forms are read over once a quarter of a Year, or, it may be, once a Month againſt the uſual

Sacra-

Sacrament-Day, the work of Preparation is thought to be well paſs'd over.

Yet I cannot but think it better to keep a conſtant cuſtomary watch over our ſelves, and upon the firſt diſcovery of any evil deſign or action, immediately to retract it within our own hearts, as in the preſence of God, and by mental Prayer, proper to the occaſion, arm our ſelves againſt committing the like for the future.

ture. Hereby you discharge a duty in its proper season, which is better than to delay it to a prefix'd distance of time: for what is most fresh in memory will make the most lively Impression upon us; but may in a little time be forgotten. Besides, we are apt to turn Forms into Formalities: And a natural discharge of religious duties must be more improving than an artificial one.

And

And by this your Ladyſhip ſees the reaſon why I have written a Diſcourſe of *Religion* in general, in Anſwer to your Letter, wherein you wrote only concerning the *Lord's Supper, viz.* becauſe I eſteem a ſerious well-inclin'd temper of Mind to be the beſt preparation, either for that, or any other of the Ordinances of Jeſus Chriſt, that we may partake of 'em with advantage and delight.

David

David adviſes us to delight our ſelves in the Lord, *i. e.* in all his ways and Ordinances. And I cannot ſee why our preparation for the Lord's Table, and participation at it, ſhould be accompany'd with greater Anxieties of Mind than our Communicating in any other holy Office; ſuch as publick Prayer or Preaching. We expect the ſame Bleſſing of God in the improvement of our Virtues from

from all of theſe Ordinances alike. And why with terrour upon our Minds we ſhould uſe any of thoſe means which God has ordain'd for our good, I do not underſtand. A Man indeed ought to perform every religious office ſeriouſly and ſoberly; but Fear by amuſing and diſtracting the Mind, is apt to render the Ordinance unprofitable.

Men ought likewiſe to be diſcourag'd from coming

ing to Prayer, Preaching or Communicating at the Lord's Table, with a careleſs, or profane temper of Mind: becauſe ſuch unpreparedneſs does harden Mens hearts, and renders the Ordinance unprofitable. Such as this was the caſe of the *Corinthians*, who in celebrating the Lord's Supper, were ſo inconſiderate of what they came to do, that ſome of them were *drunk* at the Lord's Table, as you read 1 *Cor.* 11. 21. and to this

this their prophane behaviour, thoſe Texts of Scripture do particularly relate, which affright ſome Men from, and others in receiving the Sacrament: on this account 'twas ſaid, by St. *Paul*, *that they were guilty of the body and blood of Chriſt: and to eat and drink damnation to themſelves, not diſcerning the Lord's body*, Ver. 27, 29. *i. e.* by ſuch a profane and unworthy communicating, they call down God's *Judgments* upon

upon themſelves: for ſo the word *Damnation* ought to be underſtood, becauſe it refers to the *Judgments* ſpecify'd in the following Verſe, where 'tis ſaid, that, *For this cauſe* (*viz.* of drunken Communicating) *many are weak and ſickly among you, and many ſleep*, i. e. *die*. V. 30. Now to avoid theſe *Judgments* he exhorts them to *examine themſelves*, i. e. to conſider with themſelves what was the meaning of that duty which

 they

they were to perform at the Lord's Table, which duty was this, *viz.* to call to mind the death of Jesus Christ. And this Commemoration is by St. *Paul* stil'd, *Discerning the Lord's body.*

The visible signs of our Saviour's Death, which we discern on the Lord's Table, do prepare our minds to contemplate a divine Person, who for his great Charity to the stupid World, suffer'd the high-

est

eſt injuſtice, with ſuch an invincible patience, and Heroick Fortitude, as was ſuperiour to the ſharpeſt malice of his Enemies. Thereby ſetting before us the brighteſt Example of an unſhaken reſolution to do good in ſpight of all Diſcouragements.

You will perceive, Madam, by this Diſcourſe, that the Chriſtian Religion is a wiſe, a plain, and a ſhort Inſtitution; the Belief whereof was deſign'd

to

to ſave our Souls from the power and danger of Sin, by ingrafting virtuous habits in our Minds. You will likewiſe perceive, that I hold it neceſſary to keep a conſtant watch over our ſelves, to repent as often as we perceive our ſelves to tranſgreſs, and by occaſional mental Devotion, incline our hearts to obſerve the law of Chriſt; and all this in order to build up a habit of Virtue within us. You will alſo perceive

perceive, that the Contemplation of the death of Chriſt, with all its circumſtances, tends to the ſame admirable end.

And if theſe or any other means ſhall work upon you to be generouſly juſt, to bear a good will to all Men, to do what good you can, and to be unconcern'd for the events of things which are not within your power; you will be eaſy within your ſelf,

ſelf, and ſatisfy'd in your own Conſcience, which is the Dawn of Heaven upon Earth; and you may chearfully Communicate at any time.

FINIS.